

RELATED TERMS

- Multi-Jurisdictional Exercises
- Full-Scale Exercise
- Influenza Vaccine
- Logistics



Lessons Learned Information Sharing

www.LLIS.gov

LESSON LEARNED

PRIMARY DISCIPLINES

- Emergency Management
- Public Health
- State and Local Executive Offices

Exercise Planning: Pre-Designating Backup Incident Commanders and Section Chiefs

SUMMARY

Exercise planners should identify and include backup Incident Commanders (ICs) and section chiefs in full-scale or functional exercises. Utilizing backup commanders ensures that exercise play can continue even if key players must remove themselves from the exercise in order to attend to real-world situations.

DESCRIPTION

In October 2004, the British government suspended the manufacturing license of major influenza (flu) vaccine manufacturer Chiron, the supplier of roughly half the flu vaccine used in the United States. Anticipating a resulting shortage, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released new guidance outlining distribution processes designed to restrict vaccinations to high-risk individuals. In response, the [Oklahoma State Department of Health](#) (OSDH) implemented a statewide Mass Immunization and Prophylaxis Site (MIPS) exercise to test administration of the new protocol. The full-scale exercise relied heavily upon close communication between senior officials from the six participating counties' health departments and executive offices. Because the decisions made by these officials guided exercise play for all other participants, any interruption in their communications had the capacity to severely disrupt exercise play.

Despite the importance of their role in the exercise, ICs and section chiefs were frequently unavailable to communicate decisions to other players. Participating commanders and section chiefs were periodically pulled out of exercise play for prolonged periods of time in order to respond to real-world situations. None of the jurisdictions involved had designated a backup commander to approve decisions in the absence of the primary commander or section chief. As a result, exercise players were repeatedly forced to wait until the absent individual or an official of similar authority could be located to make appropriate decisions.

This delay hampered the effectiveness of the exercise by breaking the flow of play and reducing the realism of the scenario. For example, the unrealistic delay allowed players more time to plan their actions than they would have had during a real emergency. Following the exercise, players said that having backup commanders and section chiefs of similar authority would improve decision-making processes and hasten response time. Players also noted that designating backup commanders in exercises would prepare them to command response efforts in real-world incidents when ICs would take breaks to eat, sleep, and recuperate.

Exercise planners should designate backup ICs and section chiefs for full-scale or functional exercises. Utilizing backup authority figures ensures that exercise play can continue even if

key players must remove themselves from the exercise in order to attend to real-world situations.

CITATION

- Cadaret, Ken. Director of Field Operations, Immunization Service, Oklahoma State Department of Health. Interview with *Lessons Learned Information Sharing*. 16 August 2005.
- Oklahoma State Department of Health. *Oklahoma State Department of Health Exercise: Operation Flu Vaccine*. 17 December 2004.

DISCLAIMER

This website and its contents are provided for informational purposes only and do not represent the official position of the US Department of Homeland Security or the National Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism (MIPT) and are provided without warranty or guarantee of any kind. The reader is directed to the following site for a full recitation of this Disclaimer: www.llis.gov.